Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

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Measures related to Article IV of the Convention

Strengthening national implementation: The UK Biological Security Strategy 2018

Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

I. Introduction

1. On 30 July 2018, the UK published an overarching national biological security strategy. This brings together, and sets out in one place for the first time, the wide range of activity carried out across government departments and agencies to protect UK citizens and British interests from the risk of a significant infectious disease outbreak, no matter the source – natural, deliberate or accidental. The strategy also explains how in the future the UK will coordinate its activity more strongly and take a truly comprehensive approach to meet the evolving risks (and opportunities) in this area. This will mean closer work between government departments, so that prevention activity, the deployment of response capabilities, research programmes, and our engagement with international partners, industry and academia align and their impact is maximised. This Working Paper provides a brief summary of the strategy's key themes.

II. Strategy: a summary

2. The strategy draws together the work that takes place across the UK Government to protect the UK and its interests from significant biological risks, no matter how these occur and no matter who or what they affect. It reflects on the evolving landscape and sets out how the UK will build on its existing activity to improve further its ability to reduce and respond to risks, and to exploit opportunities to address such risks.

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3. The first part of the strategy sets out the broad strategic context; it describes the nature of the biological risks and the opportunities for addressing them, and looks at how this landscape is continuing to evolve. It notes that, while the likelihood of many of the worst-case biological risks is low (particularly those that describe accidental releases or deliberate attacks), their potential impact is significant. Factors such as globalisation and developing technology all affect the risk assessment – bringing both challenges and opportunities.

4. The second part sets out that the UK's response to this context rests on four key pillars:

- **Understand** the biological risks that we face today and could face in the future.
- **Prevent** biological risks from emerging (where possible) or from threatening the UK and UK interests.
- **Detect**, characterise and report biological risks when they do emerge, as early and reliably as possible.
- **Respond** to biological risks that have reached the UK or UK interests, to lessen their impact and allow the rapid return to business as usual.

5. Two themes run through all four pillars:

- All elements of the Government's response must be underpinned by the right scientific capabilities and capacity, now and in the future.
- The UK must be able to take advantage of the opportunities that the biological sector offers, as well as responding to the risks.

III. Strategy Implementation

6. Governance for much of the activity described in the UK's new strategy falls within government departments' existing portfolios and governance mechanisms. However, the strategy outlines commitments that will only be met if the Government works together across the diverse range of departments and agencies involved. A senior cross-Government governance board will be responsible for these commitments (as well as any new areas of work or identified gaps that emerge through implementation of the strategy). This governance board will report to the National Security Council through the Home Office Security Minister. The Government Chief Scientific Adviser will maintain an oversight of developments under the strategy.

IV. Relevance for the BTWC and MX process

7. Many aspects of the UK strategy and its implementation in the years ahead may help inform discussion of the agenda items of the Meetings of Experts in the current intersessional programme. Actions already underway or planned give effect to the object and purpose of the BTWC itself. Examples include, but are certainly not limited to the following topics:

(a) Preventing biological risks includes building healthcare capacity and biological security in vulnerable regions of the world – **MX 1, MX 2** and **MX 3**;

(b) Improving laboratory capacity for diagnosis as well as surveillance of antimicrobial resistance (AMR, which can lead to drug-resistant infections in both humans and animals) in low and middle income countries through the £265 million commitment of the Fleming Fund. Building up national capability to detect and track trends in AMR in

human and animal health, as well as in agriculture, will enable countries, regions and global actors to tackle AMR – **MX 1 and MX 2**;

(c) Science and technology run through every element of our response to significant biological risks – from understanding the nature of the risks to responding to events that we are unable to prevent, everything government does must be underpinned by high quality science and evidence if it is to be effective. Accessing this science and advice involves the critical scientific capabilities within government, as well as working very closely with industry, academia and international partners, such as those contributing to **MX 2**.

(d) Supporting the development of new diagnostics, drugs, vaccines and other products that are effective, affordable, can be stored without the need for refrigeration, will shorten or simplify existing treatment schedules to reduce the risk of inappropriate use (which can cause AMR), and can be delivered without the need for highly trained staff. This will include work as part of the Ross Fund portfolio[1], to support research to develop new diagnostics and drugs to control neglected tropical diseases and strengthen the implementation of disease control programmes. Such activities are relevant for **MX 1** and **MX 4**.

(e) Working with governments and international organisations, and with industry and academia to ensure that we have in place within the UK education and training promoting a responsible life sciences research culture, and to contribute to improving education and training on these issues overseas – **MX 2** and **MX 3**.

(f) Ensuring responsible access to and work with hazardous biological materials and expertise (both in the UK and overseas) – **MX 3**.

(g) Making full use of the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team[2] – established in 2016 as a full-time deployable team of multidisciplinary public health experts. The team can deploy within 48 hours to support low- and middle-income countries to investigate and respond to disease outbreaks that pose a global threat, before they have the chance of become a global health emergency – **MX 4**.

(h) Being able to intervene rapidly (including as part of the global community) to stop outbreaks of diseases with pandemic potential at source – **MX 4**.

(i) Continuing to support the International Animal Health Emergency Reserve agreement signed between the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to provide veterinary and technical staff in the event of an outbreak of animal disease – **MX 4**.

8. The UK is globally renowned for the quality of our preparedness planning, and we have world-leading capabilities to address significant biological risks. Across local and national Government (including the devolved administrations) and through our work internationally, the UK invests hundreds of millions of pounds a year in protecting against and preparing for disease outbreaks and biological incidents. Much of this, if not all of it, is directly or indirectly relevant for the BTWC's object and purpose.

9. A copy of the UK's biological security strategy is at the Home Office website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biological-security-strategy.

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[1] See BWC/MSP/2017/WP.7, United Kingdom, Report on implementation of Article X of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention paragraph 2 and 3 for more detail on The Ross Fund.

[2] See BWC/MSP/2018/MX.4/WP.2 for more detail.